

Not as Advertised

J. B. Matthews, the Consumers Research man, stooges for the advertisers and Hearst's publisher.

THE greatest menace to advertised products, ranging from Scot Tissue to exploded rice, is not the still small consumer movement of the United States. Nor is it J. B. Matthews, whose screwball Red-baiting report via the Dies committee absolved his own Consumers Research Co., Inc., of having any interest in protecting consumers. The real menace to advertised products today, as any agency account man can tell you, is that ineffable chowderhead, Richard E. Berlin, publisher of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. For Dick Berlin hurled a Red stink bomb a few months ago that was not tested by Good Housekeeping Institute. It was the bouncing kind. It's still bouncing to the glee of all savvy citizens.

Four months ago the sober Federal Trade Commission, which was set up to prevent some too enterprising business man from selling the U. S. Treasury Building to an unwitting visitor for a fruitstand, complained that *Good Housekeeping*, Hearst's biggest money-making magazine, was indulging in "misleading and deceptive acts and practices in the issuance of Guarantys, Seal of Approval, and the publication in advertising pages of grossly exaggerated and false claims for products advertised therein." In other words, Good Housekeeping Institute, that magazine's money consumer protective service, was endorsing and even gilding the golden boasts of its advertisers. It was a good promotion dodge and netted a cool two or three million dollars a year net profit in advertising revenue for the magazine. This neat racket annoyed the other women's magazines like the *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *Woman's Home Companion* who didn't have such an added instrument for gulling their credulous readers.

The advertisers got sore, too, because the absence of a Good Housekeeping seal made them feel inferior and they had to come across with a big advertising schedule for *GH* in order to get the "Guaranty and Seal of Approval." Both these groups may have blown the whistle for the Federal Trade Commission, just as the New York department stores had the Better Business Bureau close down on Macy's a few years ago for spuriously proclaiming that it sold "for 6 percent less" than its competitors.

While the FTC hearings were going on, Dick Berlin thought to cash in on the advertisers' worry about ad debunking (started by Consumers Research publication *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*) and let out a Red-baiting blast that: "Certain subversive elements, pretending to serve the consuming public but actually motivated by Communistic theories, have persistently been attacking the institution of advertising and *Good Housekeeping* as a leading medium in the field. We believe that this

subversive movement must be publicly exposed."

Last week, J. B. Matthews of Consumers Research issued a single-handed report from the Dies committee offices listing Consumers Union, the League of Women Shoppers, and the Consumers National Federation as Communist organizations out to do in the advertising industry. Hearst papers played up this staged expose which fooled no one, not even Dies committeeman Congressman Voorhis, who denounced it.

Business Week, magazine spokesman for hardboiled American big business, pointed out an angle:

The Dies committee is running out of money. It is due to end with the new session of Congress, unless new money is appropriated. Chairman Dies may very well be counting on business interest in the consumer movement to act as a lever to get the money.

There are other inside angles that provide laughs:

Good Housekeeping readers, who might have thought a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval meant that the product so labeled had been tested for their benefit by the magazine, now are advised by the magazine's publisher that *GH* would never doubt an advertiser.

Ditto for the subscribers to Consumers Research, which J. B. Matthews helped found to expose advertisers and which now acts as stooge for *Good Housekeeping*, Hearst's golden egg.

Good Housekeeping editor Willie Bigelow, founder of the Institute, is plenty sore. After having built up the magazine over twenty years, he sees smilin' Dick Berlin ruining the racket through ineptness. Last year, Berlin tried to oust Bigelow but was prevented by the lord of San Simeon, who knows a golden-egg-laying goose when he sees one. Bigelow, incidentally, is a sympathizer of American Reds—the kind they keep on reservations.

Good Housekeeping solicitors are getting a terrible ribbing from advertising agency men as the new contracts come up and the Institute's "Seal of Approval" gets a kicking around in all the papers, with the big blast from the Federal Trade Commission yet to come.

J. B. Matthews, fouling his own nest with the Red-consumer tirade, has hit plenty of anti-Red pals who champion the consumer movement as "the Middle Way." Finland's consumer co-ops, for instance, are being touted as "proof" of the democracy of the Bank of Finland's regime by such radicals as Herbie Hoover and Thomas J. Watson of the International Chamber of Commerce.

It's Hearst by his own petard, as the old saying goes. JAMES PICA.